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ABSTRACT

In the Western Apache discourse community, landscape is not just the realm of nature in its sheer physicality. Neither are places in the landscape to be read as metaphors. Rather, places, visual things by reason of their identification with aspects of social hierarchy are literally giving moral messages, are imploring people to live right. This phenomenon operates in many if not all Native American rhetorics, though the content of the cultural texts, the specific moral message, varies among communities. And because the context essential to interpreting the messages is part of the shared knowledge of the discourse community, the "Other" cannot hear them. Unlike Western rhetorics that privilege product over process and discourse over silence, and that assign to the speaker/writer responsibility for meaning-making, Native American rhetorics are listener responsible. The process of identifying with another discourse community, that is, of acquiring its shared knowledge, is lengthy and requires great patience. (RS)

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

"I think of that mountain as my maternal grandmother": Constructing Self and Other Through Landscape

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An important impetus for this paper quietly abides, even now as I speak, on a certain portion of the Hugh Norris Trail, the leg that ascends to Wasson Peak, the highest point in the Tucson Mountains of southern Arizona. For over fourteen years now, I have been worshipping the sunset from a colossal hunk of rock outcropping about a mile up this trail. This history suffuses the hike up with significant sites along the way that I haven't precisely named but that I certainly recognize and that evoke important lessons for me whenever I go. Sometimes I tell people the "names," the stories of the places when they come up the trail with me. Only a few hundred yards from the trailhead, I might announce, "This is where I sat with Diane's brother on our first date," and point to large-boulder with-smooth-flat-top-good-for-sitting, the rock where I learned about getting rid early of men who don't like the outdoors but do like to keep me trapped inside where they do their groping. "And here, here's where I used to have to stop to catch my breath when I still smoked cigarettes," I might say as we sail past rock-in-a-bend-with-cactus-growing-from-top." "Oh, and look, here's the rock where Thom took that picture of my wrecked face after that bike accident I had when I was drunk. God, that life was awful. And speaking of which. . .over there's where I once saw a vision years ago when I was doing mushrooms: "Eat at Ernie's" was spelled out by the plants on the land. Down there, behind that ledge, that cubby-hole-rock-with-the-black-stain is where I built a fireplace and actually hauled firewood all the way up the mountain just so I could sit on my rock and stare at the open sky and the fire at the same time. My attorney ex-boyfriend scolded me for a wish so silly. No wonder we didn't make it." And then, eventually, even with a new friend, we simply stop talking and just look and look and look, absorbing the record and myth of the land.

As you can surely see, this place is most vital to me, to my history. It's where I take people if I already know that I like them or if I want to discover whether or not I might. It's a good spot to take prospective friends/lovers because, by telling them the stories of my place, I construct myself for them, show them the self that I see myself as and that I want them to see me as. Similarly, in their responses to the place and to my stories about what makes it "mine," they construct themselves in ways I know how to measure. I can decide with great accuracy if they are friend or--like Diane's brother--foe. And most of all, "my" hunk of rock is an ideal place to take old friends because I'm at home there, because together we review the stories of the spot and reinterpret them in light of what we know now. Or maybe as we walk up the mountain, we create new stories to tell and re-tell. This is a place where selves are continually being re- and de-constructed.

Perhaps you too have had such an experience with landscape and language. If so, I invite you to think on that experience, your place. If, like mine, your education and upbringing are primarily western and anglo--this sort of relationship with the land might best invoke for you an aspect of American Indian rhetorics that I explore today. For in that epistemology there's much more consequence and significance in knowing a landscape than simply appreciation of scenes and sounds, of nature in its sheer physicality. Landscape speaks more than an imperative to respect and care for the environment. In what I call Native American rhetorics--an American Indian understanding of text and ethos--landscape and language are inextricably connected, story and place are indistinguishable, morality and setting are interdependent in Native

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American rhetorics.

Keith Basso's article called "Stalking with Stories" explains this interconnection well. Based on some peculiar descriptions of landscape he'd heard from the Western Apaches living in the Cibeque community, Basso examines "names, places, and moral narrative among the Western Apache" and the provocative descriptions of their land that his informants gave:

> I think of that mountain called 'white rocks lie above in a compact cluster' as if it were my maternal grandmother [one woman says]. I recall stories of how it once was at that mountain. The stories told to me were like arrows. Elsewhere, hearing that mountain's name I see it. Its name is like a picture. Stories go to work on you like arrows.

and

> One time I went to L.A. training for mechanic. It was no good, sure no good. I start drinking. . .getting into trouble with my wife. It was <u>bad</u>. I forget about this country here around Cibeque. I forget the names and stories. I don't hear them in my mind anymore. I forget how to live right, forget how to be strong. (Basso, pp. 98-97)

The genre of stories to which these speakers are referring is the historical (as opposed to mythic) tale. Unlike other Western Apache tales, historical tales formulaically open and close with a place name designating where the events of the story occurred. This practice accounts for the incredible density of distinct place names in a relatively sparsely populated area like Cibeque. Because in the Apache language one word place names constitute a complete sentence (as in "men-stand-above-here-and-there" or "coarse-textured-rocks-lie-above-in-a-dense-cluster"), the names conjure a distinct image of a location. The historical tales set in these specific locations are about brief events that happened in the actual (as opposed to the mythic) past and that "focus on persons who suffer misfortune as the consequence of actions that violate Apache standards for acceptable social behavior" (101). Their purpose is to "alarm and criticize social delinquents (or as the Apache say to 'shoot' them)" (100); in other words, the stories are "'about' the system of rules and values according to which Apaches expect each other to organize and regulate their lives" (101). Clearly, the tales are a means by which Western Apache construct themselves.

Further, the stories provide a means by which inhabitants impute morality into their physical surroundings, make their land their ethical center, for the places themselves are seen as containing the "morals" of the stories. This view of land-as-ethos is not unique to the Western Apache. Hoijer's explanation of Navajo storytelling claims that "unless narrated events are <u>spatially anchored</u> their significance is somehow reduced and cannot be properly assessed" (101). In talking about "Language and Literature from a Pueblo Indian Perspective," Leslie Silko also describes this nexus of landscape and story: "stories cannot be separated from geographical locations, from actual physical places within the land. . .And the stories are so much a part of these places that it is almost impossible for future generations to lose the stories because there are so many imposing geological elements" (69). Thus, a statement made by Basso's consultant Annie Peaches, "The land makes people live right," can be seen as a literal claim.

Silko's declaration that future generations will not be able to lose the stories because of the imposition of geological elements brings into focus what some Native American rhetorics describe as landscape's capacity to stalk people. "A great deal of the story is believed to be inside the listener," she says, and thus we see that, in addition to being about the history of [say] Pueblo Indians, these stories are also about the audience; "the storyteller's role is to draw the story out of the listeners" (57). Basso confirms that for the Western Apache:

> every historical tale is also 'about' the person at whom it is directed. . .[for its telling is] always prompted by an individual having committed one or more social offenses to which the act of narration, together with the tale itself, is intended as a critical and remedial response" (108).

Let me very briefly explain one of Basso's examples, but please keep in mind how stripped of its rich context such a necessarily brief recounting must be. The place is called men-stand-above-here-and-there. This place is associated with a story about an Apache policeman who arrested another Apache for killing a white man's cow during a time of disease and malnutrition for the Apaches. The Apache policeman character is an object of ridicule for even thinking about arresting a fellow Apache for what is seen as a totally acceptable butchering of the cow for food, the Apache policeman character makes a fool of himself in this story which serves as a "harsh indictment of persons who join with outsiders against members of their own community and who. . .parade the attitudes and mannerisms of white men" (Basso 108) It happened at men-stand-above-here-and-there.

During Basso's stay on the reservation, this story was told at a small birthday party by the maternal grandmother of a 17 year old Apache woman. Two weeks earlier the teenager had appeared at a girls' puberty ceremonial in Cibeque wearing pink rollers in her hair despite the fact that it's very important for the women to keep their hair loose and flowing during the ceremony. Soon after hearing her grandmother tell the story of the would-be white Apache policeman, the young woman left the party, because--as the grandmother said--"I shot her with an arrow." Two years later, the girl explained to Basso how she realized that her grandmother had been talking about her in that story and so she threw her rollers away. When Basso pointed out the place called men-stand-above-here-and-there, a place only a few hundred yards from the young woman's camp, the woman smiled and said softly in her own language, "I know that place. It stalks me every day." (110)

This example demonstrates how crucial understanding context is to the comprehension of an American Indian storytelling event. The Western Apache historical tales, for instance, are always accompanied by a tacit but essential metacommunicative message from speaker to hearer, the gist of which is this:

> I know that you have acted in a way similar or analogous to the way in which someone acted in the story I am telling you. If you continue to act in this way, something similar or analogous to what happened to the character in the story might also happen to you. (108)

As in the African American practice of signifying, in this type of storytelling, the listener bears the responsibility for interpreting and choosing

whether or not to act on the metacommunicative message; even though others in the audience may fully understand the speaker's intent, they do not discuss it (at least not in the context in which the speaker delivers the message and probably never in the presence of the intended hearer). The listener for whom the message is intended may or may not ever verbally express her comprehension of the message. In addition, her comprehension may, in fact probably will, occur outside of the storytelling event. But when it does occur, as the Apache say,

> All of a sudden it hits you! It's like an arrow, they say. Sometimes it just bounces off--it's too soft and you don't think about anything. But when it's strong it goes in deep and starts working on your mind right away. No one says anything to you, only that story is all, but now you know that people have been watching you and talking about you. They don't like how you have been acting. (Basso 111-112)

> [Further], the Apaches contend that if the message is taken to heart by the person at whom the tale is aimed--and if, in conjunction with lessons drawn from the tale itself, he or she resolves to improve his or her behavior--a lasting bond will have been created between that individual and the site or sites at which event in the tale took place (Basso 108-109)

This bond between a person and a place enables the landscape's capacity to stalk someone. A similar bond between the storyteller and the intended target of the story connects the geographical site of the tale with the storyteller. These stalking storytellers are usually the grandparents, aunts, or uncles of the target, that is, the one intended to hear the story, the one who needs moral direction. Thus, someone who has been "shot" by her grandmother's arrow, who's heard her grandmother tell a story that happened at a particular mountain, may come to think of that mountain as her maternal grandmother. Long after the grandparents or uncles or aunts who are the storytellers are gone, the

> geographical locations, together with the crisp mental "pictures" of them presented by their names, serve admirably in this capacity, inviting people to recall their earlier failings and encouraging them to resolve, once again, to avoid them in the future. (Basso 113)

We can see how for the Western Apache, landscape is the ethos of a people, how geographical features function as "indispensable mnemonic pegs on which to hang the moral teachings of their history" (Basso 114). An "objectification of the symbolic content of cultural categories" (Portrait 16). Landscape becomes a cultural text itself, a text that can be read and interpreted.

Thus, we can also see the sense in Silko's claim that it's impossible for future generations to forget these stories because the geology is so imposing. We can understand the former mechanic trainee saying that because he forgot about the land when he moved to L.A., he forgot how to live right and be strong. Those of you familiar with N. Scott Momaday's House of Dawn might recall the catastrophes that befell Abel when he left the land of his home and went to L.A.. In fact,in "Man Made of Words," Momaday declares that

> The Native American ethic with respect to the physical world is a matter of reciprocal appropriation: appropriation in which man invests himself in the landscape, and at the same time incorporates the landscape into his own most fundamental experience. . .[The Indian] is someone who thinks of himself in a particular way and his idea comprehends his relationship to the physical world. He imagines himself in terms of that relationship. (qtd. in Basso 115)

Certainly we can see the logic in the notion that the Native American constructs him or her self through landscape.

By extension might we not also conclude that the Native American constructs "Other" through landscape as well? Consider, for example, how contextually bound is the rhetorical force of the historical tales and the interpretive functions of the sites in which they occurred. If the "storyteller's role [is]. . .to draw the story out of the listeners" (Silko 57), then understanding the tales requires a "kind of shared experience [which] grows out of a strong community base" (Silko 57). Those who do not share the experiences, are not of the community, are "Other": they don't understand the language and they certainly don't have the power to speak it.

Though some of us may be unfamiliar with the concept of landscape itself as cultural text, this process of constructing self and other through discourse is certainly not unfamiliar, not unique to Native American discourse. In any discourse community, "Otherness" is determined by a lack of power, a lack that in part stems from insufficient knowledge of a very particular sort, the knowledge that one must have in order to know what "things" are saying/meaning to speakers of a certain language. Consider Kenneth Burke's concept of identification. In "Rhetoric, Poetics and Philosophy" Burke discusses the impact of this concept the notion that things are "'visual words'. . .[which are] in effect communicating such <u>sheerly naturalistic</u> images as 'I am round' or 'I am farther off than I seem" (27). Such an empistemology insists that "things" cannot communicate values, are not cultural texts; rather, values are communicated by metaphor. Burke claims, however, that

> the concept of 'identification' brings up further considerations. . .in the intermediate relationship between the realm of nature (in its sheer physicality) and the realm of the social. . .Things, as 'visual words,' are not just saying the kind of things that some naturalists might consider as literal geometric and mechanistic 'facts.' Things, by reason of their <u>identification</u> with aspects of social hierarchy, are saying things like. . .'I am a threat to the likes of you' or 'I stand for the promise of reward.' [Because] natural things become identified with social judgments. . .they are not just 'visual words,' as in Turbayne's metaphor, [rather] they embody in all literalness, for man the symbol-using animal, a realm of motivation. (27-28)

We have seen that in the Western Apache discourse community landscape is not just the realm of nature in its sheer physicality. Neither are places in the landscape to be read as metaphors. Rather, places, visual "things [in the landscape] by reason of their <u>identification</u> with aspects of social hierarchy" are literally giving moral messages, are imploring people to live right. We have also seen that this phenomenon operates in many if not all Native American rhetorics, though of course the content of the cultural texts, the

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specific moral message, varies among communities. And because the context essential to interpreting the messages is part of the shared knowledge of the discourse community, the "Other" can't hear them. Not unless or until "Other" can experience the landscape through the eyes and ears of members of the discourse community will "Other" learn landscape's identification with aspects of the Native American social hierarchy.

Unlike Western rhetorics that privilege product over process and discourse over silence, that assign to the speaker/writer responsibility for meaning-making, Native American rhetorics are listener responsible. Storytellers leave many spaces, many gaps for the audience to fill in with its shared knowledge. Burke might call this persuasion by enthymeme, an argument whose missing proposition is filled in by the audience, by a mutual identification that draws them closer together. In Silko's famous comparison of the oral tradition to a spider's web, she describes the emergent quality of Native American rhetorics: "As with the web, the structure will emerge as it is made and you must simply listen and trust, as the Pueblo people do, that meaning will be made" (54).

The process of identifying with another discourse community, that is of acquiring its shared knowledge, is lengthy and requires great patience. At the outset of Keith Basso's two year project that resulted in "Stalking with Stories," for instance, his primary collaborator, Nick Thompson, tells him to "learn the names of all these places." None of the logistics or interpretation of the practice of stalking with stories was discussed until Basso had learned the names of hundreds of places in the community and listened to the stories of events that had happened in those places. Meaning could not emerge until he had acquired some of the shared knowledge of the Western Apache living around Cibeque, until he had shed at least some of his status as "other" to that discourse community. The prerequisite was long and careful listening.

The conclusion I draw here is that if I want to be able to read landscape as a cultural text, I need to listen to it. As an obvious "Other" to these Native American rhetorics I've been discussing but an equally obvious lover of landscape, I contend that if I want to understand even a bit about the "shared knowledge" that an American Indian tradition brings to the land, then I need to be silent and listen. Perhaps I need to dedicate as many as fourteen years to getting to know one place. I need to attend to an Indian credo like the one N. Scott Momaday presents in "Man Made of Words":

> a [wo]man ought to concentrate. . . on the remembered earth. [S]he ought to give. . .up to a particular landscape. . .to wonder about it, to dwell upon it. [S]he ought to imagine that [s]he touches it with [her] hands at every season and listens to the sounds that are made upon it. . .to imagine the creatures that are there and all the faintest motions in the wind. . .to recollect the glare of no one and all the colors of the dawn and dusk. (164-165)

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